EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Technology-Rich Learning

Tech Leaders Speak Up About Learning

EL recently asked winners and finalists of *Tech and Learning* magazine's Leader of the Year awards this question: "How did you improve the use of technology for deep learning in your schools?"

We Brought Our Own Technology

Seneca Valley implemented a Bring Your Own Technology initiative. Early in the school year, 13 Seneca Valley secondary teachers and their classrooms tested the effectiveness and feasibility of using digital devices in their classrooms. In the second semester, the program became available to all students in grades 7–12, and in the 2013–14 school year, we'll begin a similar implementation model for our elementary grades.

When we considered such a program, we first conducted a parent survey through our personalized data-collection system. The parents' answers convinced us that a pilot program would enable us to best gauge the effectiveness of these tools when brought from home and used in the educational process. A key component of the program's initial success has been strong support from administration.

—Sean VanScoyoc, information technology director Seneca Valley School District, Pennsylvania

We Coached Our Teachers

The key to infusing technology for deep learning is professional development for teachers. At our school, each teacher wrote his or her own professional development plan. Then we changed the job description of the technology teacher to include meeting with each teacher to refine and review these plans. Instead of teaching computers to the students, the new technology integration coach—a new title to reflect new duties–was now available to partner with the teacher in the classroom. As teachers became more comfortable, the coaching sessions centered on how to extend learning.

At the same time, our administrative team began using e-communication folders for parent communication, e-portfolios for teachers, and Moodle for virtual classroom environments. Teachers experienced rich, efficient collaboration and communication through technology. This resulted in more effective face-to face communication.

—Sister Mary Ellen Tennity, IHM, congregational leadership, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

We Tried Online Research Models

Three things are basic to preparing students to be deeper learners: (1) access to quality curriculums, teaching, and learning, (2) robust information resources, technology tools, devices, and infrastructures, and (3) a student-centered learning environment that promotes critical thinking and problem solving.

All the above are characteristic of Baltimore County Public Schools' collaborative curriculum development project, which we deliver using embedded digital tools called online research models (ORMs). An online research model is a self-guided research lesson that guides students to collaboratively solve real-world problems using online resources. The ORMs have positioned teachers and students to implement long-term and short-term research as required by the Common Core State Standards. Collaboration between teachers and library media specialists has become more focused on when to engage students in research rather than on what research assignment we should plan.

Our district's ORMs are accessible at our Office of Library Information Services website.

—Della Curtis, coordinator, Office of Library Information Services Baltimore County Public Schools, Maryland

We Became Model Tech Users

One of a leader's most important roles is to be a model for teachers–who then become models for students. Modeling digital learning in professional learning communities, faculty meetings, parent events, and everyday tasks helps adult learners in the school challenge themselves to authentically learn how to use technology.

Two years ago, our district purchased iPads for principals to use in classroom walk-throughs. Everyone saw that principals were using a digital device in their everyday job. Now iPads are commonplace in almost every classroom.

When school leaders allow adult learners and students in their buildings to witness their growth process, it shows that learning with technology is just like all other learning. We take small steps, we stumble, we try again, and eventually we can barely remember when technology wasn't a part of everyday learning!

—Karen Owen, director, professional learning Escambia County Schools, Florida

We Started Project Graduation

In 2004, Johns Hopkins University labeled Sunnyside a dropout factory. In 2007, as a newly appointed superintendent, I faced the challenge, and Project Graduation was born. This project focused district staff and the community on graduation as goal number one.

Project Graduation included six focus areas to help achieve improved graduation rates: a site-based individual graduation plan for each student; improvements in attendance monitoring; credit recovery and online learning opportunities; a freshman intervention program to catch students before they fail; an advisory period; and the digital advantage program, in which students who met certain qualifications received a free laptop. We used technology effectively in many of these areas.

For instance, for their individual graduation plans, students mapped their graduation goal and used data from assignments, grades, attendance, and other key data points to monitor their progress. Students began to monitor their attendance weekly (one of the four *A*s required to receive the laptop) and became hyper-aware of their grade point average and critical data points.

For credit recovery, students who failed a course could come to a computer lab during free periods or evenings and Saturdays to take online digital courses to make up lost credit.

Technology can not only level the playing field for low-income districts, but can also accelerate the goal to improve students' achievement.

—Manuel L. Isquierdo, superintendent Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona